

Mencken and Religion

BY MARION ELIZABETH RODGERS

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I have always thought that the gift of faith is just that—a gift. I do believe there is a God or some dimension that is beyond our comprehension. But as time goes by, I find myself agreeing more and more with Mark Twain—who said: “Go to heaven for the climate, hell for the company.”¹

Not such bad company, if you consider that joining you would be Voltaire, Mark Twain, and H. L. Mencken, all of whom shared a seeming nostalgia for hell and wrote extensively about religion. The late Christopher Hitchens, author of *God Is Not Great* and *The Portable Atheist*, said however way you look at it, at least his fellow heathens possessed this saving grace: a sense of humor.² Or, as Oscar Wilde is said to have put it: “I don’t want to go to heaven. None of my friends are there.”

So when George Liebmann asked me to speak on the Baltimore journalist and author Henry Louis Mencken and his take on religion, I was not surprised because the question about Mencken’s religious views is the one that raises the most curiosity.³

Mencken never had faith, so he never lost it. He was baptized and confirmed in the Episcopal Church, and (to the surprise of his pals) actually got married in the Episcopal Church—of St Stephen the Martyr. His mother attended the Zion Church of Baltimore and his sister, Gertrude, was extremely pious. But his grandfather and father were skeptics, and perhaps that explained Mencken’s attitude.⁴

Growing up, there was a Bible on display in the front parlor, but he not recall anyone ever opening it. On Sunday mornings, he and his siblings were packed off to Sunday School, if only so his father could get some sleep. What Mencken remembered from all those Sundays were the “exhilarating hymns”—one of his favorites was “Are You Ready for the Judgement Day.”⁵

I don’t think Mencken himself ever prayed. To him, that was as barbaric as those who carry a rabbit’s foot to bring them luck.⁶ He said: “When I am in trouble, I send for a doctor, a lawyer or a policeman, not for a clergyman.”⁷ When he did consult the Bible, it was not for spiritual inspiration, but for the “lush” beauty of its poetry.⁸ His own copy dates from 1904, and you can see this well thumbed little volume among his papers at the Enoch Pratt Library.⁹

Although Mencken described himself as a “theological moron,” the subject of religion fascinated him throughout his life. Sometimes it showed itself in gags, as for instance when he would inscribe Bibles to friends, “With the Compliments of the Author.”¹⁰

More often, Mencken made his observations about religion in his coverage for his newspaper, *The Baltimore Sunpapers*, his magazines and in his books. His *Dictionary of Quotations* has nine pages devoted to the entries “GOD” and “GODS”, with sources ranging from the Bible to Mary Baker Eddy to Spanish, Italian and Irish proverbs, including this little gem: “Let us thank God there is no God.” The source is marked “unidentified” but I would not be surprised if the author is not Mencken himself.¹¹

Mencken’s outspoken views inspired the clergy to give sermons entitled “God Is Still God, In Spite of H. L. Mencken.”¹² When the Reverend Stratton, one of the most famous evangelists of his day, was invited to give a lecture on the Bible at Harvard, and was jeered by students, ministers suggested that a team of 40 priests should be fanned across the United States to speak at universities, so the young could be saved from “H. L. Mencken and his ghoulish crowd.”¹³

Mencken was writing at a time, during the 1920s, when the evangelical movement was beginning to flourish

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across the country and the gap between urban and rural life was large. It was in the small towns, mostly in the South and Midwest, where religion flourished and the Bible was taken seriously—even literally. (The term, “Bible Belt,” is actually Mencken’s invention.) Our own political landscape today is very reminiscent of the one Mencken knew during the 1920s.¹⁴ Mencken would have been fascinated to see the resurgence of religion in our politics, mainly in the white evangelical movement within the Republican party, in the concept of National Prayer Day, National Prayer Breakfast or the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative.

When it came to mixing Christianity and politics, Mencken was not a big fan, especially if it meant that government was using its powers to curtail Constitutional and first amendment rights.

Mencken had written about all of these themes. He blamed the evangelicals for Prohibition and the Ku Klux Klan, for sowing hatred, dividing neighbors, and having an ignorant contempt for facts and science. But it was during the Scopes Trial of 1925, in Dayton, Tennessee, when Mencken reached his journalistic peak in his writing of religion and against what he called “the imbecilities” of the anti-evolutionists.¹⁵

Mencken was friends with Clarence Darrow and the lawyers Dudley Field Malone and Arthur Garfield Hays of the ACLU; when they heard that William Jennings Bryan was going to help Tennessee for the prosecution of John Scopes, the school teacher who had been arrested for teaching the theory of evolution to his class, they pricked up their ears. Hays consulted with Mencken about the strategy for the defense.

Mencken advised Hays not to get Scopes acquitted. “This seemed to me a folly,” advised Mencken. “The thing to do, I argued, was to use the case to make Tennessee forever infamous, and to that end Scopes would be a small matter. Above all....to lay all stress not on Scopes, who was a nobody, but on William Jennings Bryan, who was an international figure....Getting Scopes acquitted would

be worth a day’s headlines in the newspapers, and then no more, but smearing Bryan would be good for a long while.”¹⁶

The Scopes Trial was known as The Trial of the Century; there were hundreds of correspondents on hand, but it was Mencken’s coverage that was quoted abroad. “For all its legal forms,” he wrote, the Scopes trial “takes on the air of a religious orgy....where Genesis is the first and

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greatest of law books and heresy is still a crime.”¹⁷ Mencken had to leave town before Darrow’s cross-examination of Bryan, where he grilled him on the Bible. Five days after the trial ended, and Bryan died of a heart

attack, the townspeople blamed Darrow for killing Bryan with his inquisition. If so, as Mencken put it, “that was a job of public sanitation that Darrow never regretted.”¹⁸

But it wasn’t Mencken’s reports about free speech, the separation of church and state, and his mockery of William Jennings Bryan that caused the most offense in Tennessee—it was eyewitness account of a Holy Roller meeting, and his description of Pentecostals going into trances.¹⁹

For the first time in his life Mencken was in daily contact with Christian people, and at Dayton he made a point of getting to know many of them, including Pastor Martin of the Anti-Evolution League, the only evangelist in town, Mencken said, “who did not perspire hate,” and who happily shared with Mencken his pamphlets, entitled “Hell and the High Schools” and “God or Gorilla.”²⁰

As John Scopes recalled, Mencken helped produce one of the “screwballs” that roamed Dayton that summer.²¹ Mencken had 500 copies of a circular that he had written, and distributed it. The circular suspiciously resembled one of those by Pastor Martin, but this one advertised the work of a fictional evangelist named Elmer Chubb, who promised to perform miracles. Dr. Chubb claimed he would allow himself to be bitten by any snake or scorpion or drink any poison brought to him. There were testimonials, from Bryan—“With my own eyes I saw Dr. Chubb swallow cyanide”—as well as Mencken—“Chubb

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is a fake. I can mix a cyanide cocktail that will make him turn up his toes in 30 seconds.”²² Hundreds of Mencken’s circulars were seen discarded and flying about on the grass. Mencken soon found out why. “No one was interested in Dr. Chubb,” he recalled. “The miracles he offered were “old stuff in the Tennessee hills.”²³

In spite of the trial’s lack of dignity, Mencken told his readers they would be making a big mistake if they viewed it as a trivial farce. Mencken proposed the next American who wanted to spend a million dollars should dedicate it to civilizing Tennessee, which he called “a Holy Land for imbeciles.”²⁴

The trial against the teaching of Darwinian evolution became symbolic in American culture for its anti-intellectual stance. When, as Mencken wrote, theologians declare that God created the universe during a certain single week of the year 4004 BC,”science cannot suffer them gladly.”²⁵

Mencken was himself a man of science and, as George pointed out in his lecture last year before the Mencken Society, Mencken would have not joined the 1987 opinion that said a public school could teach the theory of evolution alongside the teaching of “creation science.”²⁶ I don’t need to tell a room full of lawyers that nearly 90 years after the Scopes Trial, the battle between anti-evolutionists and the public schools continues.

The universe, according to Mencken, was governed by law. Nonetheless, he admitted “No sane man denies that the universe presents phenomena quite beyond human understanding.”²⁷ He also ventured to guess that the universe was not run by one God—but by a whole boardroom of them—which is why things on earth were such a botch.²⁸

When it came to his consideration of the various faiths, he was against all of them, whether it be Islam, Buddhism, or Judaic Law. Most of his focus was on Christianity, because that was what he knew from boyhood. At its best, he wrote, Christianity was “a solace” for the downtrodden, a solace against the intolerable.”²⁹ Nonetheless, Christians, wrote Mencken, “love God on a salary; all their devotion is selfish, they expect to be rewarded for it.”³⁰ Mencken’s own code of ethics revolved around the concept of honor. The honorable man, Mencken argued, was not guided by fear or guilt, but by an inner compass that led him to do the decent thing.³¹

One Bishop said that despite Mencken’s protests that he believed in nothing, he actually knew more about the canons of the Church than most members of the American Catholic Hierarchy.³² Mencken was a great reader, and subscribed to *Catholic World* and other publications; in his own magazine, *The American Mercury*, he read and reviewed a large number of theological books. One of his favorites, which may interest this audience, was written by a lawyer and an associate editor of the *American Bar Association Journal*, which questioned the plausibility of the Bible, and which Mencken praised for its “superb logic.”³³

In 1930, Mencken wrote his own book on religion, called *Treatise on the Gods*; his bibliography is a model of industry, and contains over 100 books, ranging from the psychology of religion to the war of science and theology. Unlike many of his other works, which consisted of a reworking of his newspaper columns, this book was entirely new, and remained among his favorites. It was also among the most successful, going through 10 printings in 3 years – even though there were those, at the *Catholic World*, who found it difficult to take Mencken seriously in the field of ethics or religion; others called him a brilliant but shoddy thinker.³⁴

In his book, Mencken described the origin and nature of religion from the first primitive priests to sunworshippers, to its evolution, to Christian form, and finally, the state of Christianity in the United States in modern times circa 1930. Mencken argued that the leaders of organized religion are reactionary, support the status quo, and are opposed to science, progress, and social reform.

On divorce, Mencken’s view was that it was between the two parties. When it came to the death penalty, Mencken thought it “astonishing that the sentimentalists who protect against punishment always forget that imprisonment may also be very cruel.”³⁵ But he also thought the death penalty, when applied to convicted murderers and the like, had the eugenic effect of getting rid of a bad gene pool, and cited the United Kingdom as a prime example of a country that had very little crime because of their initial use of it.³⁶ That is not to say that he took joy in attending public hangings. As for birth control, this was a matter of private conduct and a

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woman's individual rights; to him, a woman should not be regarded as a sow.

Mencken was embarrassed when readers wrote to him, confessing that his opinions had shaken their faith.³⁷ He disliked converts, and refused to be converted himself, though many of his friends among the local clergy tried to do so. Often they and Mencken could be seen in Baltimore, affably mixing beer and theology at Schellhase's. Sister Miriam from Catholic University visited Mencken at his house; Mencken always politely answered her letters, though he suspected she was simply trying to steer him towards Catholicism, as did his evangelist friend, Pastor Martin, from the Scopes Trial, who went to his death in the full hope that sooner or later, he would save Mencken.³⁸

Howard Kelly, one of the most celebrated and famous surgeons of Johns Hopkins Hospital, also tried to convert Mencken, but even he couldn't pull off that miracle. As a medical man, Kelley somehow was able to balance science and spirituality and wrote *A Scientific Man and the Bible*, which Mencken favorably reviewed.³⁹

I have to pause here so I can give you an idea of Kelly's personality: He spent one to four hours a day studying the Bible, usually in the original Greek text, and felt it was his duty to share his beliefs.⁴⁰ Whenever he was in a taxicab, for instance, when the traffic light would turn red, he would tell the driver: "Cabby, I hope when you and I come to heaven, the light will be green."⁴¹ For hours he would speak to Mencken "rather sugarishly" hoping to bring him up to grace. "I want to win you for Christ under whose banner I serve," was a typical refrain.⁴² "I bade him to do his damndest," Mencken said, "but predicted he would never fetch me."⁴³ To Mencken, Kelly's ideas seemed to be "insane," and he wondered how it was possible for "the human brain to be divided into two insulated halves, one functioning normally, naturally, even brilliantly, and the other capable only of ghastly balderdash...."⁴⁴ Whenever they traveled to Washington together on the train, Mencken felt like jumping out of the window.⁴⁵ But Dr. Kelly was not one to be defeated. He carried a Bible in his pocket and also kept a Prayer List, with the

names of 21 souls requiring his steadfast invocation, that included his fellow colleagues at Johns Hopkins Hospital along with the Mayor of Baltimore. Topping the chart was H. L. Mencken.⁴⁶

It may seem odd that such an unholy man as Mencken actually became the diplomat—or, as he put it, "the hired assassin"—who settled a major controversy between the priests of the Catholic Church and the Baltimore *Sunpapers*.⁴⁷

You probably all know that during its early days the *Sun* had always been a mainstay of the Catholic Church.

There was even a legend in Baltimore that the real owner of the newspaper was a rich nun.

During the 1930s, one of the *Sun* reporters, who had been recently

been expelled from Germany for writing against the Nazis, compared Adolf Hitler to the Jesuit saint, Ignatius Loyola—hardly the stuff that should have gotten into a daily paper in a city full of Catholics.

As was to be expected the response of Baltimore's Archbishop was livid. Michael Curley was a bellicose Irishman, who also commanded a great deal of power; he called for a boycott.⁴⁸

Supporting him was the *Baltimore Catholic Review*, which printed a picture of school children dressed in white for their first Communion, with the heading: "INSULTED BY THE SUN." Thousands canceled their subscriptions. Advertisers withdrew ads.

The weeks went on, with both sides unyielding, during a heat wave that Mencken was sure would go down in history as one of the worst on record, with days so hot he marveled there were so few suicides. Meanwhile the Archbishop, having launched the offensive, went to Ireland to spend time with his aging mother.⁴⁹

What was necessary, of course, was diplomacy—and so it was to Mencken that everyone turned. As it turns out, this was just the kind of "refined entertainment" that Mencken relished. He was aided by his friendships with the local clergy and the Archdiocese of Washington, DC. Over lunch, they came to a compromise. By the time Curley returned from Ireland, the Catholic boycott of the *Sun* was over.⁵⁰

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There was not much Curley could do—by this time, the poor man's face had erupted with shingles and he was housebound. Although he accepted the truce, privately he was furious. Nestled within the archives of the Catholic Archdiocese here in Baltimore are the letters that tell the story. As for Mencken, said Curley, "His reputation here is that the fellow does mean half he says. He abuses everybody in sight, but" — he had to admit, Mencken had "not yet openly attacked the Catholic Church."⁵¹

Bishops admitted, that while Mencken "is intellectually very close to the Church, spiritually, he is about one million miles away."⁵² But instead of relegating Mencken to eternal damnation, they insisted on their admiration of the journalist. Meanwhile, Bishop Curley, who had been lobbying to be named Cardinal, was passed over. The whole episode delighted Mencken.

As I mentioned, Mencken often met with the local clergy, who enjoyed discussing with him such topics as prison reform or the burial rites of Egyptians. He devoted a long chapter in *Treatise on the Gods* on how primitive man and religions regarded death and what came next. As for the afterlife, Mencken said, "Death is the end. Life is pleasant, and I have enjoyed it, but I have no yearning to clutter up the universe, without habitation or name, when it is all over."⁵³ In this, Mencken would probably agree with the opinion of the late Steven Hawking, who said "Heaven is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark."⁵⁴

Too often, Mencken wrote, people make the mistake of assuming that death should convert one's spirit into another entity. That was true of his friend the writer Theodore Dreiser, who believed in the occult. Dreiser was fascinated by fortune tellers, and mediums; he also attended séances. If spirits really do exist, Mencken argued, "why don't they tell us something worthwhile, instead of confining themselves to such obvious pieces of news as: Uncle Henry is very happy in Heaven and Casanova is not among those present."⁵⁵

"If I, for instance, should die tomorrow from an overdose of wood alcohol and should turn up as an articulate vapor next Wednesday night in the dining

room of [the medium] Madame Celeste's flat down in Greenwich Village, what sound reason should there be for expecting me to betray the fact that I have gone to Hell, that there are enough pretty girls down there to give me a very jolly time, and that if I had to live my life over again I should doubtless be just as great a jackass as I had been?... Why shouldn't I continue to have the same good time now that I was a ghost? Damned if I know."⁵⁶

The closest Mencken ever could admit there might be some kind of existence after death was

when he admitted that, perhaps, since we are all made up of energy, that is where we shall end up.

When all was said and done, he said, "Religion means nothing to me."⁵⁷ You might ask—maybe with pity—how did Mencken find meaning and purpose in life? For Mencken, life's purpose was "a delight in truth...and...the impulse to track it down." Atheists such as Carl Van Doren and Albert Einstein thought basically the same.⁵⁸

That quest for truth—and the resulting satisfaction it brought Mencken—had served him well when he was healthy and at the top of his game as a journalist and author. It was quite another matter after he suffered his stroke in 1948, leaving him unable to see clearly, or to read or write. The shadow of this betrayal—whether by medicine or some other higher force—hung heavily on him. One afternoon Bill Abell of the *Sunpapers* came by to see him. "I envy you your religion," Mencken told him. "Because as a Catholic, you would be getting a great deal of consolation from your faith."⁵⁹

Did Mencken ever yearn to have such faith? When his mother and his wife died, he told a friend that he wanted to believe, but had not been able to. Nor could he now. The only semblance of peace came when Mencken gazed out of his third floor study window, and watched the nuns pace through the gardens of The House of Good Shepherd (the location Steuart Elementary School occupies now). When Mencken eventually grew despondent with the medical care he was receiving from Johns Hopkins, he turned to Bon Secours Hospital. Here, the man who had spent a lifetime denouncing religion, was cared for by nuns.

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If legally assisted suicide had existed in Mencken's day, as it does now in Oregon, would Mencken have taken advantage of it? In the face of illness, Mencken would not have believed suicide morally wrong, but a release. Even so, Mencken told doctors he would not commit suicide, if for the sake of his brother.⁶⁰

He left strict instructions that at his funeral no Christian service be performed. He made his brother promise him as much, since their religious sister Gertrude could also be extremely bossy. Before his stroke, Mencken had written for the need "for a...soothing burial service for the admittedly damned," "free" from piety yet consoling.⁶¹

Since no such rites existed, Mencken's funeral lasted less than five minutes. Gertrude was so furious about the lack of a service that when it was over, she stormed out.⁶² Years later, she presented her church with a golden chalice in memory of her brother. "Although he was not an active member of my church," she said, "At least he was reverent toward it."⁶³ And that is true. Mencken may have been prejudiced towards Christians, but as he confessed, "I can't imagine myself laying any burden on a man, or denying him any common right, on the sole ground that he is a Christian."⁶⁴

He had even left open the possibility that he could be mistaken about immortality. Years before his death, a bishop once asked him: Henry, what will you do when you are at the pearly gates, and confronted by the Twelve Apostles? Well, said Mencken, I will simply say: "Gentlemen, I was wrong."⁶⁵

NOTES

1. There are various versions of this quotation by Mark Twain. See: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2011/07/19/heaven-for-climate>.
2. Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever, Selected with an introduction by Christopher Hitchens* (New York: De Capo Press, 2007), p. xxv.
3. See: Charles A. Fecher, *Mencken: A Study of His Thought* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978); D. G. Hart, *Damning Words: The Life and Religious Times of H. L. Mencken* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016); S. T. Joshi, Editor, *H. L. Mencken on Religion* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002)
4. H. L. Mencken to Henry W. Chapin, August 22, 1939. (NYPL)
5. *Ibid.*
6. D. G. Hart, *Damning Words*, p. 245.
7. H. L. Mencken to Alfred Dohne, December 30, 1946. (EPFL)
8. H. L. Mencken, *Treatise on the Gods* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), p. 345.
9. Inside of the maroon Bible Mencken typed this note: "This finally wore out in 1946. The two Treatises brought it into tatters and the revision of *The Treatise on the Gods* finished it. HLM October 30, 1946." Among Mencken's collection of books at The Mencken Collection, EPFL.
10. H. L. Mencken to Henry W. Chapin, August 22, 1939 (NYPL); H. L. Mencken to Mrs. Bertha Carter, June 5, 1942 (EPFL): "Theology has always fascinated me, but only as politics has fascinated me—that it is say, I like to investigate it not as a contribution to human knowledge but as a manifestation of human folly." Fred Hobson, *Mencken: A Life* (New York: Random House, 1994), p. 291.
11. H. L. Mencken, *A New Dictionary of Quotations on Historical Principles from Ancient and Modern Sources* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942, 1987), p.467.
12. Marion Elizabeth Rodgers, *Mencken: The American Iconoclast* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 307. These quotes come from the newspaper articles in Mencken's clippings books located at the Mencken Room at the Enoch Pratt Free Library. "Dr. Stratton Praying, He Says, For Mencken," *The New York Times*, September 13, 1926. It should be noted that the reaction to Mencken's coverage seem to bear out his observation that "Christians seem to have a special talent for hatred, almost a vocation." When, for instance, in 1916,

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- Mencken wrote about evangelist Billy Sunday, and observed that by the time Billy Sunday left Baltimore, not only was the city was full of the spirit of God, but the evangelist had amassed a considerable private fortune, readers wrote to the *Sunpapers* stating that if they had to choose between Billy Sunday and Mencken, there was no contest: the most pious suggested Mencken be tarred and feathered, and burned alive. H. L. Mencken, "Religious Prejudice," Joshi, *Mencken on Religion*, p. 101; Rodgers, *Mencken: The American Iconoclast*, pp.150-51.
13. "Laughter Fills Bible Lecture," *Boston News-Post*, October 16, 1925.
 14. See: Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).
 15. D. G. Hart, *Damning Words*, p. 140.
 16. H. L. Mencken, *Thirty-five Years of Newspaper Work*, Edited by Fred Hobson, Vincent Fitzpatrick, Bradford Jacobs (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 137.
 17. H. L. Mencken, "Mencken Likens Trial to a Religious Orgy, With Defendant a Beelzebug," *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, July 11, 1925.
 18. H. L. Mencken, "A Gladiator of the Law," Editorial, *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, March 14, 1938.
 19. H. L. Mencken, *Thirty-five Years*, p. 141. H. L. Mencken, "Yearning Mountaineer's Souls Need Reconversion Nightly, Mencken Finds," *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, July 13, 1925 from *The Impossible H. L. Mencken; A Selection of His Best Newspaper Stories*, edited by Marion Elizabeth Rodgers (New York; Doubleday, 1991), pp. 576-582; for a discussion of Dayton's reaction to Mencken's coverage of a Holy Roller meeting, see Rodgers, *Mencken: The American Iconoclast*, pp. 276-278.
 20. H. L. Mencken, "Impossibility of Obtaining Fair Jury Insures Scopes Conviction, Says Mencken," *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, July 10, 1925.
 21. John T. Scopes and James Presley, *Center of the Storm: Memoirs of John T. Scopes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 99.
 22. The copy of the circular is actually among the papers of Edgar Lee Masters, Mencken's friend, at The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas.
 23. H. L. Mencken, *Thirty-five Years*, p. 143.
 24. H. L. Mencken, "The Sad Case of Tennessee," *The Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1926.
 25. D. G. Hart, *Damning Words*, p. 139.
 26. George W. Liebmann, "Mencken on Church and State," Speech before the Mencken Society, September 9, 2017.
 27. H. L. Mencken to Marion Bloom, May 29, 1921. (EPFL)
 28. H. L. Mencken, "Hint to Theologians," Joshi, *Mencken on Religion*, p.64.
 29. H. L. Mencken, "The Literary Heavy-Weight Champion," *The Smart Set*, March 1910, p. 156.
 30. H. L. Mencken to Marion Bloom, December 1920. (EPFL)
 31. H. L. Mencken, *A Mencken Chrestomathy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p.111.
 32. Helen Essary, "A Cowed Lot," *The Washington Times*, December 19, 1935.
 33. H. L. Mencken, "Counter-Offensive," *The American Mercury*, May, 1926, pp. 123-25. The lawyer was Joseph Whelas, who had written *Is It God's Word*. The letters between HLM and Joseph Whelas are not extensive; I thank Dr. Vince Fitzpatrick, Curator of the H. L. Mencken Collection and Ms. Meg Gers of the Periodicals Department, both of the EPFL, for their help in sending me copies of the correspondence.
 34. "Mencken, Moralist!" *The Catholic World*, June 1934, p. 257; Hazelton Spencer, "Mencken on Religion," *The New Republic*, May 14, 1930; John K. Ryan, "H. L. Mencken Still Stupid in New Edition," *The Tidings*; "Rabbi Attacks

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- Mencken's Views on Religion as Distorted," *The Baltimore Sun*, April 7, 1930.
35. H. L. Mencken, "Men in Cages," *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, December 17, 1934.
36. H. L. Mencken, "Jack Ketcham as Eugenist," *The American Mercury*, July 1925, p. 353.
37. H. L. Mencken, "Autobiographical Notes 1941," The H. L. Mencken Collection (EPFL).
38. H. L. Mencken to Henry W. Chapin, August 22, 1939 (NYPL); See the various letters between Mencken and Rev. Peter Ainslee, editor of *The Christian Union Quarterly*; Rabbi Charles Rubenstein; Rev. R. B. Schmitt, Father Hacker; Father Ayd; John L. Bazinet; Dr. J. Hofmann; Reverend Edwin Leonard; all at the Maryland File of correspondents at the Mencken Collection, EPFL; Mencken was also a correspondent with Sister Miriam Gallagher, see: *The Diary of H. L. Mencken*, Edited by Charles A. Fecher (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), pp. 105-107; H. L. Mencken, *Thirty-Five Years*, p. 143.
39. H. L. Mencken, "Fides Ante Intellectum," Joshi, *Mencken on Religion*, pp. 228-231.
40. William S. Dutton, "The Most Important Thing in My Life," *The American Magazine*, December 1924, p. 19.
41. Laurence E. Karp, "The Fundamentalist and the Iconoclast: Howard A. Kelly and H. L. Mencken," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, February 6, 1975, p. 297.
42. Howard Kelley to H. L. Mencken, March 17, 1916. (EPFL)
43. H. L. Mencken, *Thirty-Five Years*, p. 43.
44. H. L. Mencken, "Fides Ante Intellectum," Joshi, *Mencken on Religion*, p. 230.
45. H. L. Mencken to A. H. McDannald, May 2, 1923. (EPFL)
46. H. L. Mencken, *Thirty-five Years*, p. 38; Howard A. Kelly Diaries, 16 March 1916-30 April 1916, p. 5. Howard A., Kelly, Diaries, January 1916-February 1929, Box. 26. (The William Chesney Medical Archives, The Johns Hopkins University).
47. HLM to Joseph Hergesheimer, July 21, 1934. (Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.)
48. HLM to Edgar Lee Masters, July 12, 1934, Papers of Edgar Lee Masters (The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin); more can also be found in Mencken's "Letters and Documents Relating to the *Sunpapers*" (EPFL); Charles Fecher, "New Look at Old Media Flap," *The Catholic Review*, March 19, 1982.
49. HLM to Bishop Cannon, July 14, 1934 (NYPL); Hamilton Owens to Alfred A. Knopf, July 29, 1963 (Gwinn Owens Papers, now at the EPFL)
50. HLM to Edgar Lee Masters, July 14, 1934 (Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Austin at Texas)
51. Archbishop of Baltimore Michael J. Curley to Rev. F. C. Kelley, Nov. 5, 1934 (Archives Archdiocese of Baltimore.) I am grateful to Rev. Paul K. Thomas, Archivist, Archdiocese of Baltimore, who helped me with this research on February 28, 1995.
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54. "No Heaven? Why Steven Hawking's Comment Doesn't Seem to Matter," Stephanie Pappas, "Live Science," May 16, 2011.
55. H. L. Mencken, "The Spirit World," *The Smart Set*, December 1922, p. 48.
56. *Ibid*
57. H. L. Mencken, "Autobiographical Notes, 1941," (EPFL)

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58. *Ibid.*, and Hitchens, *The Portable Aetheist*, pp 138, 155.
59. Author interview with William Abell, August 17, 1991.
60. D. G. Hart, *Damning Words*, p. 228.
61. H. L. Mencken, "Services for the Damned," Joshi, *H. L. Mencken on Religion*, p.78.
62. Author Interview with Elise Cheslock, January 21, 1994 and April 14, 1996.
63. Robert G. Breen, "A Mencken Memorial," *The Baltimore Sun*, December 10, 1959;"Anna Mencken Dies at 93; Was Mencken's Sister," *The Baltimore Sun*, September 30, 1980.
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